

The Adventure Begins!

For the next 21 miles, you can enjoy the sweeping vistas, natural and cultural history, and recreational opportunities offered by the Black Hills Back Country Byway.

The route is marked with mileage signs, with milepost 1 on the Safford side and milepost 21 on the Clifton side of the byway. Use these markers and your odometer to locate the interpretive stops described in this brochure.

Near each end of the road you will see a National Back Country Byway kiosk. These exhibits provide historical information about the byway, as well as information on road conditions and safety considerations.

- 0.3** The road you are traveling on was built by prisoners between 1914 and 1920. On the west side of the byway, rock piles mark prisoner grave sites. One of the prisoners was killed by a guard while attempting to escape in 1916, and the other prisoner apparently died of natural causes.
- 0.4** Back Country Byway kiosk.
- 0.7** The two-mile long Heber Tank Road leads to a livestock water tank. Wildlife, such as javelina, can sometimes be seen near this pond.
- 2.2** The prominent butte seen to the east is part of a massive lava flow of rhyolite. The butte rests on lava flows of andesite and dacite. The golden cliffs of Yellowstone Canyon to the north are comprised of volcanic ash.
- 2.7** The Black Hills Rockhound Area can be seen in the valley below.
- 3.2** On the west side of the byway, Deadman Canyon Road provides access to the lower portion of the Gila Box Riparian National Conservation Area approximately six miles away. The road on the east side of the byway winds two miles to the Black Hills Rockhound Area, however, access from Highway 191 is much easier.
- 3.3** The remnants of an old cinder mine can be seen on the west side of the road. This pit was worked in the 1940s. The wooden beams formed the framework for a platform where trucks were loaded with rock. The light-colored rock you can see was formed by ash ejected from nearby volcanoes.
- 3.7** The Twin C Ranch headquarters, one of the early ranches in this area, can be seen in the valley to the east.
- 4.0** The side of this mountain was blasted loose in the 1950s to create the steep-walled cinder pit. Pumice that originally covered the cinder deposit was mined, exposing the reddish cinders. Cinder, a tough but lightweight building stone, was transported to a brick plant in Safford. Today, these cinders are used for road construction and maintenance.
- 4.4** The road above the cinder pit offers one of the most spectacular views of southeastern Arizona's mountains. Dos Cabezas Peak, more than 50 miles away, can be seen in the south.
- 4.6** Erosion has taken on an unusual appearance along the north side of the road. Here, volcanic rocks have eroded by breaking into concentric, curved shells in a process called exfoliation.
- 5.0** Grazing on public lands is an important part of the local economy. Here you can see some of the ranchers' livestock facilities: corrals for holding livestock before their transport to market, a ramp for loading cattle into trucks, a tank for storing livestock water, and a metal squeeze chute to restrain animals during branding or doctoring.

- 5.9** Volcanic rocks along most of the byway consist of dark gray to brownish-gray lava flows. Erosion of this lava produces talus slopes of dark, blocky rocks seen on many hillsides.
- 6.9** The rugged Wire Corral Mesa Road ends at a bluff overlooking the Gila River. This ten-mile round-trip route provides a round-trip opportunity for the very adventurous and experienced mountain biker.
- 7.2** High above the surrounding landscape, the Black Hills Overlook provides outstanding views. The Freeport-McMoRan mining operation can be seen in the northeast, the steep cliffs deep within Eagle Creek canyon are to the north, the Gila River canyon is northwest, and Mount Graham can be seen to the southwest. Turtle Mountain is to the left of Eagle Creek on the horizon.
- 9.4** This tower is part of a Federal Aviation Administration remote communications network. It serves as a repeater to boost high-frequency signals, allowing pilots to speak with a communication facility in Prescott. The tower also provides a navigational aid for pilots flying between Phoenix and Albuquerque.
- 9.9** In the valley below you, man-made ponds, known as Saddle Tanks, catch rainwater, providing a source of water for livestock and wildlife. Mule deer and Gambel's quail can often be seen here.
- 10.8** Note the diverse vegetation in this interior chaparral community in the valley. The habitat here draws a variety of wildlife, as it provides protected cover and an abundance of food. The yellowish-green mistletoe that can be seen on some of the shrubs is an important wildlife food.

On the south side of the byway is the Dark Canyon Road. Due to steep inclines and limited space for turning around, this road is not recommended for vehicles. This is the midpoint of the byway and a good time for a stroll through the oak woodland along this side road. The towers atop Guthrie Peak to the south are part of an important communication site.

- 11.0** There are very few springs on this mountain. The BLM, in conjunction with ranchers and the Arizona Game and Fish Department, often constructs small water sources for use by wildlife. Fences are constructed around these projects to exclude livestock from the area. You can sometimes notice a fenceline contrast here, but BLM studies show the number and density of plants are the same inside and outside the enclosure.
- 11.3** This section of Dark Canyon supports white oaks because it is a little wetter and cooler than the surrounding hillsides. The trees and shrubs in the draw below provide important habitat for birds and other wildlife.
- 12.7** The Goat Camp storage tank is a small portion of a much larger livestock water facility that includes 38 miles of pipeline. Water that originates from a well near the Gila River is pumped to Goat Camp tank. From here it is pumped to the top of Guthrie Peak, then gravity-fed to many storages and troughs.
- 13.1** Stop at the exhibit here to learn about the history of Freeport-McMoRan's Morenci copper mine, the number one producer of copper in North America. The present mine complex and associated facilities stretch over 50 square miles. More than 16 billion pounds of copper have been produced by this operation.

On the west side of the byway, Goat Camp Road leads to several small dirt tanks and ties into the Wire Corral Mesa Road after 6.5 miles, making it a nice loop road for four-wheel-drive vehicles or mountain bikes.

- 13.4** The masonry dams east of the road were built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s to stop erosion. They have helped stabilize the road and watershed by trapping sediment and preventing erosion.
- 13.9** The public lands serve as important powerline corridors. The double-poled 230-kilovolt line is owned by Arizona Electric Power Cooperative. It runs from the Apache Power Plant near Cochise, southwest of Willcox, providing power for the Clifton-Morenci area. The smaller line, owned by Duncan Valley Electric Cooperative, provides power to a ranch house, wells which pump water to livestock and wildlife developments, and to the communication site on Guthrie Peak.
- 15.1** This rock bridge crossing Pumroy Canyon was constructed by Civilian Conservation Corps members stationed in the nearby camp.
- 15.2** Mesa Tank Road on the east side of the byway provides access to public lands for hunting, hiking, and photography. The five-mile road eventually leads to a cliff overlooking the Gila River. It is extremely rough and should be attempted only by experienced off-highway drivers.
- 15.9** Hundreds of rock spreader dikes form an extensive network of erosion control structures on steep hillsides high above the Gila River. Members of the Civilian Conservation Corps built these dikes to reduce topsoil erosion.
- 16.4** The ruins on the west side of the road are that of an old prison camp. A concrete shower facility and a rectangular oven are all that remains of this once-busy camp that housed over 100 people. Prisoners constructing this part of the road between 1917 and 1919 slept in tents inside an area surrounded by a high fence. To the north, a CCC camp housed workers from 1935 to 1937, but today nothing remains of this camp.
- 17.1** The byway crosses the Gila River on the Old Safford Bridge. Originally designed as a steel structure, this bridge was constructed of concrete due to limits on the use of steel during World War I. Completed in 1918, the bridge is on the National Register of Historic Places. The river channel provides a good view of the Gila Conglomerate, naturally cemented sands and gravels which form cliffs over 100 feet high along the river. These rocks were deposited from the volcanic highlands, then cut through by the river.
- Picnic areas at the each end of the bridge serve as launch points for those floating the Gila River. In early spring, snowmelt enables rafts, kayaks and canoes to float through the Gila Box Riparian National Conservation Area to Bonita Creek, 19 miles downstream.
- 18.2** The steel girders of an abandoned railroad trestle are all that remain of the Morenci Southern Railroad. The track, constructed in 1900. was used to transport passengers and freight between Morenci and Guthrie until 1922. Over 450,000 pounds of powder were used for blasting to construct the railbed, and more than one million board-feet of timber were used for trestling. The railway incorporated five, 360-degree loops to attain the elevation needed to reach the old town of Morenci. Special locomotives were needed to manage the short curves of the Morenci Southern.
- 19.0** On the west side of the byway, a narrow road four miles long leads toward Gillard Hot Springs along the Gila River. The road deteriorates and ends before reaching the river, but the hot springs can be accessed by hiking the last quarter mile along the abandoned road. The springs are located at the edge of the river and are not exposed during high river flow. At a temperature of 180 degrees Fahrenheit, Gillard is the hottest natural spring in Arizona.
- 19.9** If you're lucky enough to be here at the right time, you can experience the roar of huge engines of the Southern Pacific Railroad as they pass below you. The trains transport materials to and from the Freeport-McMoRan's Morenci operation.

20.6 Take a short walk south of the National Back Country Byway kiosk and look very closely. These small rock piles, which stored water around crops, were part of a prehistoric agricultural field used by Mogollon people 1,000 years ago. Commonly grown crops included agave, corn, beans, and squash.

The narrow San Francisco River Road on the west side of the byway winds over three miles to the river. This extremely rough road provides an opportunity for experienced four-wheel-drive enthusiasts to test their skills.